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[\[Search\]](#) [\[Next story\]](#)

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Companies cool to tactics of global warming lobby

London. The Global Climate Coalition (GCC), the US energy lobby group that has challenged some of the main conclusions of United Nations climate scientists about the severity of manmade global warming, has suffered a setback to its lobbying efforts with the resignation of two member companies and the possibility of further withdrawals.

BP America, a subsidiary of British Petroleum, and the Arizona Public Service Company, a Phoenix-based electric power utility, are pulling out of the group, which earlier this year accused scientists working for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of distorting the conclusions of a key report in order to over-emphasize the role of human activities in climate change ([see Nature 383, 287, 1996](#)).

Klaus Kohlhase, head environment adviser at BP headquarters in London, says that BP felt its interests in the United States were not best represented by remaining in the coalition. But BP, he says, will stay a member of the International Climate Change Partnership, an alternative industry lobby group which he describes as "a more moderate and conciliatory" body.

Mark De Michele, chief executive of the Arizona Public Service Company, partly shares that sentiment. "Global climate change is a serious problem and we need to take steps to deal with it," says De Michele, one of the architects of a Clinton administration-backed initiative to persuade power utilities voluntarily to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. "I was concerned that to continue to attack the science -- which the GCC is basically doing -- is not the way forward."

Representatives of environmentalist groups, such as the US Climate Action Network, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Greenpeace, say that the resignations are a significant development. Paul Horsman, head of oil campaigns at Greenpeace, claims that some members of the energy industry are realizing that the GCC has lost credibility and are re-grouping around other organizations, such as the climate change partnership and the Business Council for a Sustainable Energy Future.

But Bill O'Keefe, president of GCC and a vice-president of the American Petroleum Institute, shrugs off the resignations. "We're adding members, not losing them," he says. "We have eight to ten new board members, and are still the leading business voice in climate change."

Both BP and the Arizona Public Service Company, says GCC's executive director John Shlaes, were 'general' members, a category he describes as "an educational forum". 'Board' membership, on the other hand, entitles companies to influence GCC policy, and costs US\$20,000

annually (general members pay US\$2,500).

This summer, the GCC mounted a vociferous campaign to contest a report written by scientists working for the IPCC, which had been re-edited just before publication. The GCC claimed that the alterations amounted to "scientific cleansing". The scientists said the changes were necessary to clarify parts of the text that had earlier confused policy-makers. The ensuing war of words caught the attention of Republican members of the US Senate, who convened a series of hearings into the matter.

Several GCC member companies are understood to have been uneasy about the organization's aggressive tactics. And in July, a senior US administration official weighed in by indirectly referring to the GCC as "naysayers and special interests bent on belittling, attacking and obfuscating climate change science", in a speech to the annual conference of the climate convention in Geneva (see [Nature 382, 287; 1996](#)).

But the withdrawal of the Arizona Public Service Company is also believed to have been influenced from another quarter -- the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, an association of institutional investors representing US churches and other religious-based investments. The centre, which claims to represent combined investments of US\$70 billion, has asked each GCC member company -- where its affiliates are shareholders -- to resign from the coalition.

Ariane van Buren, director of the centre's environment programme, says the GCC should not be allowed to do further harm to the process of dealing with global climate change. "In no case should [a member] company allow its name to be associated with any additional GCC activities that distort the facts." Companies, she says, should join "responsible business coalitions".

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